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ABSTRACT

Including students with disabilities in regular classrooms is a controversial issue. Federal law PL 94-142 offered all children with disabilities equal educational opportunities and began the concept of the least restrictive environment (LRE). The 17th annual report to Congress on the implementation of LRE law suggests that school districts are not generally following the LRE mandate. Teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings is a multifaceted task that requires a team of mutually supporting players who provide the best practices for all students. The preponderance of research supports placing students with disabilities in inclusive settings because it benefits everyone involved, although researchers caution that a one-size-fits-all approach will be disastrous for students with disabilities. Some researchers suggest that inclusion is not beneficial for a variety of reasons. However, most schools are faced with the task of implementing inclusive education. It is essential to assure that each student's goals and objectives are met. New tools, curricula, instruction, and programs are needed that recognize all students' needs and behaviors. Professional preparation of school personnel is essential. Teachers must learn new teaching strategies and understand how to work cooperatively with other teachers, parents, and the community. Without proper planning and support, successful inclusive placements are difficult. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

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ED 423 225

Inclusion: Panacea or Delusion

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Introduction

A preponderance of literature attest to the fact that most disabled children should be placed in inclusive classrooms. This position has created some controversy regarding inclusive versus special class placement as noted by (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1995; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998; Banerji & Daily, 1995; Bear & Procter, 1990; Zigmond et al., 1995; Borthweek - Duffy et al., 1996; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Rogers, 1993, Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). The common consensus of these researchers indicated that the concept of inclusion is an excellent idea, however, it may not work for all children all of the time.

Historically, this issues as discussed in the 1970s. The issue was whether disabled children learned best in integrated or segregated classes. Most of the research indicate that prior to 1975, most disabled children with mild disabilities were educated in integrated classes, those with server to profound disabilities were educated I segregated classes. Federal legislation, PL 94-142 change this concept and gave all disabled individuals equality of education opportunities with the concept of the least restricted environment (LRE) which provided all disabled children opportunities to be educated with their non-disabled peers. The (LRE) provided for both types of placements, integration and segregation, assessment data used in completing the IEP are used to determine the LRE for disabled children in comparing the research over the last two decades, data still support that inclusive placement is no panacea for educating all disabled individuals

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Some Key Controversial Issues

Integration of disabled children in to the regular classroom and elimination of separate special education classrooms have been issues of major concern in the field of special education for well over two decades (Katsiyannis, Conderman, & Franks 1995; Sawyer, McLaughlin & Winglee, 1994; Baker, Wang & Walberg, 1995; Borthwilk-Duffy; Palmer, & Lane, 1996; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). A multitude of conditions and trends has attributed to the controversy. As indicated, federal legislation generally support educating disabled children in the regular class. However, there is a provision in the individuals with disabilities should be removed from regular education only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aides and services can not be successfully achieved.

Data from the seventeenth annual report to congress on the implementation of IDEA, 1995 does not support that school districts are not generally following the least restrictive mandate (LRE) percentage of learning disabled children educated in regular classes ranged for a lower 20% to a high of 35%, there percentages represent an increase in the number of learning disabled children educated in regular classes in comparison to 1979 (McLeskey & Pacchiano, 1994; McLeskey & Waldron, 1995).

Research results in the field have endorsed both educating disabled children in both inclusive and special education classrooms. Teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings is a multifaceted task that cannot be accomplished by just one person. Inclusive education happens when a team of mutually supportive players pledges to provide best practices for a student with disabilities. Inclusive education focuses on a combination of best practices in education, including cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and community building in classrooms and schools. Teaching strategies for inclusive settings are synonymous with effective teaching

strategies used in any area of education inclusive settings are of education (Aefsky, 1995). Depending on the disability and level of student need, a team with unique but complementary skills should be consulted to guide, advocate for, and implement this student's educational program. More than any other element, the need for team effort to manage, deliver, and support a student's inclusive education is a drastic change for regular educators. Educators must develop a plan to integrate the life-long goals and specific needs of students with disabilities within the content of the regular curriculum (Filbin, 1996).

Advocates

Collectively research in support of inclusion is based upon:

1. Federal legislation in support of educating disabled individuals in regular classes.
2. Research findings tend to support that disabled children perform academically as well in inclusive classes as separate classes.
3. When provided with support, many disabled children are able to succeed in regular education classrooms.
4. The continuum of service model is not needed in inclusive settings, disabled children should be placed in regular classes on a full time basis.
5. Disabled children will benefit from associating with their normal peers.
6. Inclusion will reduce labeling of disabled children.
7. Inclusion tends to increase interaction between disabled children and their non-disabled peers.

The preponderance of research tends to support placing disabled children in inclusive settings (Banerji & Daily, 1995; Bear & Proctor, 1990; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edleman, & Schattman, 1993; Sharpe, York, & Knight, 1994; Staub & Hunt, 1993; Robert & Mather, 1995,; Zigmond, Jenkins, Fuchs, DeNo, Baker, Jenkins, & Couthino, 1995; Alper, 1995; Mills & Balach,

1996). Inclusion offers the non-disabled student an opportunity to develop an appreciation for the complexity of human characteristics as well as an appreciation for individual differences. Students who have not had these experiences may be surprised to learn that for examples, speech problems that accompany cerebral palsy do not necessarily indicate limited intelligence, cognitive impairment need not affect social development, and sensory impairment need not interfere with skill in motor activity. Additionally, students with disabilities may teach non-disabled learners to go beyond dysfunctional stereotypes. All students with behavior disorders are not aggressive, and students with learning disabilities can be highly capable in some academic areas.

Advocates for full inclusion of disabled children indicate that it is their democratic right to be educated with their peers, integration of disabled children with non-disabled children improves interpersonal skills so the studies indicate that curriculum inclusive schools should be appropriate for different levels of disabilities and sensory acuity. There is no separate knowledge base for teaching disabled children. Teachers must be innovative and employ creative teaching strategies, such as learning center, cooperative learning, concept teaching, directed teaching and team teaching. Many adaptations and modifications will be needed in the instructional process, depending upon the amount and degree of disabling conditions present. To the extend possible disabled children should be included in the learning process (Barry, 1995; Wang, Reynold, & Baker, Wang, Walberg, 1995; Staub, & Peck, 1995; Johnston, Proctor, & Corey, 1995; Jorgensen, 1995).

Proponents of full inclusion believe that a one size-fit all approach will be disastrous for disabled children, it is not only unrealistic but also unjust. To correct this injustice according to Shanker, (1995) public laws addressing inclusion will need to be rewritten to fund the cost of inclusion, provide adequate training for all teachers, to give equal weight to requests from parents

and referrals by teachers, teachers must be totally involved in writing the IEP, and alternative arrangements should be made to temporary place disabled children while the placement issues is discussed. Although the preponderance of research support the concept of inclusion, some researchers question whether or not disabled children can receive an adequate education in a regular classroom setting (Fuchs, 1994; Borthwicks-Duffy, Palmer, & Lane, 1996).

In summary most of the research in opposition to inclusion state that inclusion will not work for disabled children due to the following:

1. Disabled children with serious problems tend to perform better in separate classes.
2. There is a need to preserve the continuum of specialized programs and placement options.
3. Disabled children enrolled in special classes performed as well as those in regular classes on curriculum-based measures.
4. Disabled children will interfere with the progress of regular students.
5. Placing disabled children in regular classes can lead to stigmatize labels.
6. Some regular student may began to mimic inappropriate behaviors of some disabled children, thus affecting learning.
7. Some parents fear that services for their disabled children will not be available under inclusion.
8. Parents of non-disabled children fear that their children would be neglected in the classroom due to special attention required for disabled children.

Segregated schools are considered safe havens for some parents because they provide the specialized services needed for their disabled children.

Critical Issues to be Considered

Inclusion has proven to be a powerful tool in education disabled individuals. This trend is supported by the voluminous research reviewed in this paper. The author support the notion that

inclusion vs. special placement is not the critical issue facing educators, rather are through well defined goals and objectives, instructional strategies, competent personnel, supportive services, related resources, community and parental support, successfully delivery models, and positive attitudes of staff members toward disabled children.

When there is no consensus on goals or objectives, there is no logical means for choosing one approach over another, one kind of staff over another, one program component over another. It would not make sense to were made explicit and a set of priorities were chosen. Clearly stated educational goals for disabled children would minimize the conflict in the field. On the other hand, an avoidance of clearly stated goals allows educators to verbally support appropriate programs. If clearly beneficial objectives, unique for a particular disability cannot be identified, then the disabled group in question should not be segregated from normal society or regular classes. It is true that while behavioral objectives of classroom instruction have been fairly well defined in most disability areas, with the exception of the retarded and learning disabled. Clearly defined objectives will emphasize expected behaviors of children as well as skills and activities needed to reach the objectives.

To achieve these goals for disabled children, educators should have scientific objectives in mind, as well as a plan for sequencing steps or task that will lead to desired behaviors. Steps that educators may take to assure that objectives and goals are met are as follows:

1. Understanding and categorizing the objectives of the school's curriculum.
2. Defining the objectives or goals in terms of expected behaviors based upon observable and measurable data.
3. Developing instruments, materials and activities to assess or determine if desired behaviors have been met.

4. Instituting changes at any point in the instructional process it appears that objectives are not being achieved.

5. Sequencing tasks where retarded children can experience success. This will involve moving from known to unknown experiences, from concrete to abstract levels.

Application of these steps will allow educators to achieve one of the chief objectives of the school - promotion of learning. It is almost impossible to gauge how successful an instructional program has been unless objectives are first clearly and concisely stated.

By defining goals on a continuum of levels of difficulty, a two-fold purpose is accomplished. First, the teacher is assisted in establishing objectives for each class in such a way that they are sequential in an ascending order of difficulty, and they are also achievable in a foreseeable future; second, because individual capabilities and competencies vary among children with comparable measurable abilities, such a sequence permits some advance more rapidly than others in a single class.

Since most goals for disabled children are essentially short-range, in contrast with the traditional concept of short- and long-range plans for it becomes increasingly important for the stated objectives to be precise and clear-cut. In addition, there is a need for frequent evaluation of progress made, together with a review of an estimation of the child's potential in relation to his/her attainment. Finally, it is important that the limited capacity in mental, physical and social growth not be dissipated in meaningless or unproductive activity.

Another crucial problem that communities and educators must face before they elect to choose a plan for their children is that of sequencing instructional tasks. Special educators must consider lake adjustment out of school in essence, what will the final product be. Before a plan is

adopted, however, those behaviors which the pupil must master for successful living must be identified and programmed in sequential steps for the goals and instruction to be useful. These procedural changes should take priority over the inclusion versus special class placement controversy.

More effective tools and new curricula to measure the characteristics of pupils must be developed, disabled emphasized needs and characteristics, rather than placement. The curriculum for disabled children be based upon realistic goals and approaches. These approaches in turn should be formulated on the basis if needs, capacities and interests.

Individual differences and program scope recognized when planning an instructional program for disabled children. Program scope includes the totality of experiences and activities to which an individual is exposed during a specified period of time. Therefore, teachers must be skilled in informal assessment procedures so that both the general and specific characteristics of the children can be described and reacted to in the instructional program. The evaluation of an instructional program includes evidence that the program has the basis for conclusions and recommendations for improving the program. All relevant data should be matched or developed to meet the program's objectives; data and information not germane to the objectives should not be included in the instructional process.

Recognition by the disabled child as a whole, from the time of his identification to the time of discharge, should seem to warrant methods of instruction that take into account all of his /her specific behaviors. These behaviors would include the development of desirable general personality characteristics and the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills that should emulate from the instructional program. In essence, the instructional program should be directly associated with the goals and objectives set forth. The instructional program should be functional

and include both literacy skills, problem solving techniques and communication skills. Refer to chapter 7 for additional details on curriculum development.

Professional preparation of school personnel is desperately needed. High standards are needed for the selection of directors, supervisors, and teachers of disabled children to achieve stated goals. Ideally, before placing a special child into any class, the training attitudes and values of the teacher should be carefully and precisely delineated. Discovering a pupil's characteristics, which a given teacher will accept or reject, becomes a critical administrative duty. The nature of the teacher's response to expressed hostility, physical attributes, and academic skills should be included in the placement decision. Questions of this nature are critical and have more relevancy then inclusions vs. special class placement. Solutions are not easy, but revisions in teaching training are evident; teachers must be trained to seek, identify, and emend the assistance needed to educate disabled children.

Teachers must be trained to employ new teaching strategies, as well as cooperating with other teachers, parents and the community. As much as their mental, physical, and social disabilities will permit, teachers should actively involve disabled children in the instructional process. Collaboration amount teachers is necessary in order to provide the best possible education for disabled children. Joint planning, modification and adaptation in the instructional program are essential to assure equality of education opportunities to disabled children.

If proper supportive services are not provided for disabled children, no degree of placement will be successful. Special helping teachers, itinerant or school-based team teaching a resource room and other well-known educational manipulations are needed if any plan is to be successful. Disabled children generally have many handicaps that the school cannot manage alone - speech disorders, defective hearing, poor reading ability, weak vision, and behavioral

maladjustment - conversely, the services of many specialists will be needed to promote better pupil growth and adjustment

A desirable relationship between school and community is marked by a strong bond of understanding and cooperation between parents and school personnel. Patents should have a direct share in deciding what plan of placement appears to service that their children's needs best. Parents should be made to feel free to make suggestions for the guidance of their children and should be actively involved in all aspects of the planning process in a direct constructive way. Educators recognize the positive contributions that many parents of disabled children can make such as resource individuals, quest speaker, consultants, volunteers, substitute teachers, assisting on field trips and other school related activities, however, this important resource is frequently overlooked by educators. The issue at hand is not whether a particular school district has selected inclusion over special placement or vice versa, but whether there is mutual support and acceptance of the plan advanced. Without this agreement, it is doubtful whether any plan could be successful.

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